



## Honoring Presidents' Day by Upholding the Rule of Law

**February 16, 2026** – Presidents' Day traces its origins to 1885, when Congress established Washington's Birthday as a federal holiday to honor America's first President and, more importantly, the office he helped define. From the beginning, the day carried a meaning deeper than celebration alone. It reflected a distinctly American idea: that power is temporary, leadership is constrained by law, and no individual stands above the Constitution.

The drafters of the Constitution deliberately rejected monarchy.

Having fought a revolution against a king, they designed a system in which the President would be a servant of the people, bound by law, accountable to institutions, and limited in power. The Presidency was never meant to be an instrument of personal will or grievance. It was meant to embody restraint, dignity, and respect for democratic norms.

George Washington understood this better than anyone. By voluntarily relinquishing power after two terms, he established one of the most important precedents in American history. He made clear that the Presidency was not a possession to be held, but a trust to be returned to the people. Washington rejected a third term out of principle. He feared that prolonged rule by a single individual would invite factionalism, weaken republican government, and move America closer to the very monarchy it had rejected. This concern resonates with particular force today as Presidential power has increased over the last several decades. In stepping away when he could have remained, Washington demonstrated that the office mattered more than the individual, and that a republic survives only when power is exercised with restraint.

Presidents' Day was intended as a moment of civic reflection, not spectacle. It was created to encourage thoughtful consideration of leadership, responsibility, and the constitutional limits of power. When that purpose is overshadowed, the holiday loses its meaning, and the office it honors is diminished.

At this moment in our history, those principles are under strain. The office of the President is being diminished by rhetoric and conduct that treat law as an obstacle, institutions as enemies, and dissent as disloyalty. That is not strength. It is a departure from the very traditions that Presidents' Day was created to honor.

America never wanted a king. We chose a constitutional republic governed by laws, not by men. The legitimacy of the Presidency depends not on dominance or force, but on fidelity to the Rule of Law and respect for the limits that define it.

As trial lawyers, we understand better than most that democracy survives only when institutions hold, norms matter, and power is checked. On this Presidents' Day, the International Academy of Trial Lawyers recommits itself to those ideals and to the enduring truth that no office, and no person, is above the law.

To honor Presidents' Day, we will remain vigilant in supporting and upholding the Rule of Law and will speak out when we believe that it is under attack by any person or institution.

This statement is issued by the President and Executive Committee of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.